

Maine Food Stamps Recipients May Be Required To Work Or Volunteer

Local News WABI - TV5, Bangor, ME
August 20, 2014

Advocates for the poor are urging Governor LePage's administration to scrap a plan that would require people to have a job to receive food stamps.

LePage's administration announced last month that it will no longer seek a federal waiver that has allowed jobless people to continue receiving benefits in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Non-elderly, non-disabled adults receiving food stamps would have to work a minimum of 20 hours a week, volunteer or be involved in a work training program in order to keep their benefits. DHHS Commissioner Mary Mayhew said the Departments of Labor and Education would help folks meet the requirements

"There are over 7,000 jobs available in the job bank today. We believe that the focus of this department should be to help people support themselves and their families and to break the cycle of dependency on these programs and generational poverty," Mayhew said.

States that meet certain unemployment requirements are eligible for the waiver from the federal government. States can also apply for partial waivers if they have some areas with particularly high unemployment rates. Last year, 36 states including Maine applied for and were granted a waiver from the federal work requirement. Another 10 states received partial waivers. Maine was eligible once again but the LePage administration made the decision to comply with the federal requirements as opposed to applying for the waiver.

At a public hearing Wednesday, people lined up to plead with the administration to reconsider that decision. Among them was Melanie McKean, Development Coordinator for Preble Street, a Portland based non-profit whose mission is to help those in need. Preble Street is operated in part by a large contingent of volunteers and at first glance one might think they would benefit from a potential onslaught of people looking to volunteer in order to keep their benefits. McKean said that is not the case. She says adding potentially thousands of volunteers so quickly would be more of a burden than a help.

"Volunteers are much like an employment workforce in that they have to be managed they have to be supported, have to be trained. We take great pride in doing that very well. It takes effort. It takes staff. It takes time and it takes money. And all of those things currently are being stretched," McKean said.

Amy Regan-Gallant, from the Preble Street Hunger Initiative argues that there's a reason these types of

waivers exist in high unemployment regions. She says in addition to there not being enough volunteer opportunities, she fears there won't be enough work opportunities and the end result will be people will losing their benefits.

“12,000 Mainers will be significantly hungrier starting in January because of something that's entirely out of their control. Maine qualifies for this waiver because of our unemployment rates. We continue to qualify and we strongly urge the governor to renew this waiver,” said Regan-Gallant.

If the changes make it through the rule-making process, they're scheduled to go into effect October 1.

(The Associated Press Contributed To This Report)

Page 1

Maine Food Stamps Recipients May Be Required To Work Or Volunteer

[Local News](#)

Advocates for the poor are urging Governor LePage's administration to scrap a plan that would require people to have a job to receive food stamps.

LePage's administration announced last month that it will no longer seek a federal waiver that has allowed jobless people to continue receiving benefits in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Non-elderly, non-disabled adults receiving food stamps would have to work a minimum of 20 hours a week, volunteer or be involved in a work training program in order to keep their benefits. DHHS Commissioner Mary Mayhew said the Departments of Labor and Education would help folks meet the requirements

“There are over 7,000 jobs available in the job bank today. We believe that the focus of this department should be to help people support themselves and their families and to break the cycle of dependency on these programs and generational poverty,” Mayhew said.

States that meet certain unemployment requirements are eligible for the waiver from the federal government. States can also apply for partial waivers if they have some areas with particularly high unemployment rates. Last year, 36 states including Maine applied for and were granted a waiver from the federal work requirement. Another 10 states received partial waivers. Maine was eligible once again but the LePage administration made the decision to comply with the federal requirements as opposed to applying for the waiver.

At a public hearing Wednesday, people lined up to plead with the administration to reconsider that decision. Among them was Melanie Mckean, Development Coordinator for Preble Street, a Portland based non-profit whose mission is to help those in need. Preble Street is operated in part by a large contingent of volunteers and at first glance one might think they would benefit from a potential onslaught of people looking to volunteer in order to keep their benefits. Mckean said that is not the case. She says adding potentially thousands of volunteers so quickly would be more of a burden than a help.

“Volunteers are much like an employment workforce in that they have to be managed they have to be supported, have to be trained. We take great pride in doing that very well. It takes effort. It takes staff. It takes time and it takes money. And all of those things currently are being stretched,” Mckean said.

Amy Regan-Gallant, from the Preble Street Hunger Initiative argues that there’s a reason these types of waivers exist in high unemployment regions. She says in addition to there not being enough volunteer opportunities, she fears there won’t be enough work opportunities and the end result will be people will losing their benefits.

“12,000 Mainers will be significantly hungrier starting in January because of something that’s entirely out of their control. Maine qualifies for this waiver because of our unemployment rates. We continue to qualify and we strongly urge the governor to renew this waiver,” said Regan-Gallant.

If the changes make it through the rule-making process, they’re scheduled to go into effect October 1.

(The Associated Press Contributed To This Report)